

Restorative Justice, Ritualised Reconciliation and the Prevention of Cyclical Revenge Killings

A Global and African Perspective

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Abstract: Restorative justice has gained growing recognition as an alternative or complementary approach to conventional criminal justice. Rather than viewing wrongdoing solely as a violation of state law that requires punishment, restorative justice conceptualises it as harm inflicted on individuals, relationships, families, and communities. It therefore seeks to address victims' needs, establish meaningful offender accountability, repair damaged relationships, and support the reintegration of affected parties. This conceptual article examines the development, principles, and global application of restorative justice, with particular attention to traditional African approaches to communal conflict and cyclical revenge killings. It argues that restorative justice can interrupt revenge cycles by creating a culturally legitimate process through which responsibility is acknowledged, victims are heard, compensation is negotiated, communal relationships are repaired, and commitments to non-retaliation are publicly affirmed. The article gives particular attention to reconciliation rituals, shared meals, oath-taking, collective witnessing, and the invocation of moral or spiritual authority. These practices can transform a negotiated settlement from a private agreement into a socially and morally binding covenant. However, restorative justice should not be romanticised or treated as an automatic substitute for formal justice. Its legitimacy depends on voluntary participation, victim safety, impartial facilitation, proportional accountability, respect for human rights, and effective institutional follow-up. The article concludes that a hybrid approach combining restorative processes, culturally legitimate ritual practices, and formal legal safeguards offers considerable potential for addressing interpersonal and communal violence while preventing renewed retaliation.

Keywords: *Restorative Justice, Revenge Killings, Ritualised Reconciliation, Customary Justice, Communal Conflict, Compensation, Accountability, Social Cohesion.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Restorative justice has attracted considerable academic, legal, and policy interest as an alternative or complement to conventional approaches to crime and conflict. The approach is founded on the understanding that wrongdoing does more than violate a statute or challenge the authority of the state. It causes harm to victims, damages relationships, disrupts families, weakens community trust, and may create conditions for repeated violence. Justice, from this perspective, should therefore extend beyond determining guilt and imposing punishment. It should identify the harm caused, recognise the needs of those affected, establish the obligations arising from the harm, and create an inclusive process through which the damage can be addressed.

The United Nations describes restorative justice as a flexible, participatory, and problem-solving response to criminal behaviour that may complement or, where appropriate, provide an alternative to conventional criminal justice processes. Its central participants commonly include victims, offenders, their families, community representatives, facilitators, and relevant state authorities. The United Nations Economic and Social Council has also emphasised dignity, equality, voluntary participation, informed consent, procedural fairness, and the protection of participants as essential elements of restorative justice programmes (ECOSOC, 2002; UNODC, 2020).

In practice, restorative justice may involve victim-offender mediation, family-group conferencing, community

conferences, sentencing circles, reconciliation ceremonies, reparative agreements, truth-telling forums, and community accountability processes. Although face-to-face engagement is common, it is not always necessary or appropriate. Indirect communication, representatives, written statements, or separate preparatory meetings may be used where direct encounters could expose victims to intimidation, trauma, or further harm.

Restorative justice is particularly relevant to communal conflicts in which violence is understood collectively rather than solely as an individual offence. In settings affected by cyclical revenge killings, a murder may be perceived not only as an offence committed by one individual against another, but also as an injury inflicted by one family, lineage, clan, or community against another. Responsibility, grief, compensation, honour, and retaliation may consequently become communalised. A conventional criminal prosecution may punish an individual offender without resolving the broader relationship between the affected groups. Unaddressed grievances may then survive the trial and continue to generate retaliatory violence.

This article examines how restorative justice, particularly when reinforced through culturally legitimate reconciliation rituals, can contribute to interrupting cycles of revenge killing. Its central argument is that compensation alone may settle the material dimension of a dispute, while dialogue alone may establish a temporary political understanding. A more sustainable settlement requires acknowledgement, responsibility, reparation, restored dignity, collective witnessing, reintegration, and a publicly recognised commitment to non-retaliation.

The article addresses the following question: How can restorative justice, reinforced through culturally legitimate reconciliation rituals, interrupt cyclical revenge killings and restore relationships between affected families and communities?

II. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This is a conceptual and interpretive article based on a narrative review of selected scholarly literature, international standards, and comparative restorative justice practices. It does not report findings from original field research. Instead, it synthesises theoretical arguments and comparative experiences to construct a conceptual explanation of how restorative justice may prevent renewed retaliation.

The article draws on literature concerning restorative justice, Indigenous and customary justice, religious contributions to restorative thought, communal accountability, compensation, reconciliation rituals, and the relationship between formal and informal justice systems. Because traditional justice practices differ considerably across societies, the article does not claim that there is a single African or Indigenous model of justice. It identifies recurring restorative characteristics while recognising cultural, historical, and institutional diversity.

III. CONCEPTUALISING RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Restorative justice changes the questions through which wrongdoing is understood. Conventional criminal justice commonly asks: What law was broken? Who broke it? What punishment is deserved? Restorative justice instead asks: Who has been harmed? What are their needs? Who is responsible for meeting those needs? What must be done to repair the harm and reduce the likelihood of its recurrence?

Crime is therefore treated as harm to people and relationships rather than exclusively as an offence against the state. The victim becomes an active participant whose experiences, questions, losses, fears, and expectations should influence the justice process. The offender is expected to do more than passively receive punishment. Meaningful accountability requires the offender to acknowledge the harm, listen to those affected, accept responsibility, make reparation where possible, and take steps to avoid repetition.

The community also has an important role. Community representatives may clarify the social consequences of the offence, support victims, assist offender reintegration, contribute to reparation, challenge conditions that enabled the harm, and monitor compliance with agreements. The state remains responsible for establishing legal safeguards, protecting fundamental rights, preventing coercion, prosecuting serious crimes where required, and ensuring that restorative processes do not become instruments of discrimination or impunity.

Restorative justice should therefore not be equated with forgiveness, reconciliation, compensation, mediation, or leniency, although it may include elements of each. Forgiveness cannot be demanded from a victim. Reconciliation may be desirable but is not always achievable. Compensation may repair material loss without addressing emotional injury or broken relationships. Mediation may produce compromise without establishing responsibility. A process becomes genuinely restorative when it places harm, needs, obligations, participation, accountability, and repair at its centre.

IV. RESTORATIVE AND RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE

Restorative justice is frequently presented as the opposite of retributive justice. The distinction is useful but should not be overstated. Retributive justice emphasises legal culpability, proportional punishment, deterrence, and the public denunciation of wrongdoing. Restorative justice emphasises harm, participation, responsibility, reparation, healing, and reintegration. Nevertheless, a justice system may legitimately incorporate elements of both.

A serious offence may require formal prosecution to protect the public, affirm legal norms, prevent impunity, and impose proportionate consequences. At the same time, prosecution may not answer victims' personal questions, repair family relationships, facilitate acknowledgement, or

address the social conditions that contributed to the offence. Restorative processes can therefore operate before, during, after, or alongside criminal proceedings.

Restorative justice is sometimes criticised as a 'soft' approach because it does not always prioritise imprisonment. This criticism confuses punishment with accountability. An offender may endure imprisonment without acknowledging the harm caused or taking steps to repair it. Conversely, a carefully designed restorative process may require public acknowledgement, apology, compensation, community service, treatment, behavioural commitments, reparative work, and continued monitoring. These obligations may be personally and socially demanding.

Restorative justice nevertheless cannot guarantee deterrence or rehabilitation in every case. Contemporary evidence indicates that restorative programmes are associated with improved victim and participant satisfaction, stronger perceptions of procedural justice, greater accountability, and, in some contexts, modest reductions in general reoffending. However, effects vary according to programme design, participant characteristics, offence type, methodological quality, and the voluntariness of participation. Recent meta-analytic evidence found only limited overall support for reductions in recidivism and did not find a significant reduction in violent recidivism, although other victim- and participant-related outcomes were more consistently positive (Fulham et al., 2025; Latimer et al., 2005).

Restorative justice should therefore be assessed according to several outcomes rather than recidivism alone. These include victim recognition, emotional recovery, offender accountability, compliance with reparation, restored relationships, community confidence, procedural fairness, social reintegration, and the prevention of retaliation.

V. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

➤ *The Modern Restorative Justice Movement*

The modern restorative justice movement developed through small-scale initiatives during the 1970s and later expanded into criminal justice, juvenile justice, schools, workplaces, prisons, transitional justice, family disputes, and community conflict resolution. Victim-offender reconciliation initiatives associated with Mennonite communities were influential in the movement's early development in North America. Christian beliefs concerning repentance, mercy, forgiveness, reconciliation, human dignity, and the restoration of broken relationships contributed to the moral language of some early programmes.

The religious contribution should, however, be interpreted carefully. Restorative justice is neither exclusively Christian nor a creation of Western religious institutions. Practices resembling restorative justice existed in numerous societies before the emergence of the modern movement. Furthermore, contemporary restorative justice is supported by secular legal, psychological, sociological, criminological, and human-rights arguments. Scholarly

accounts nevertheless recognise the significant contribution made by Mennonite and other peace-church traditions to the organisation and expansion of the modern restorative justice movement (Noakes-Duncan, 2016; Yoon, 2019).

Religious and spiritual traditions can strengthen restorative processes by providing an ethical vocabulary through which wrongdoing, repentance, mercy, responsibility, forgiveness, and reconciliation are understood. However, religious language must not be used to pressure victims into forgiving offenders or remaining in unsafe relationships. A victim's participation and decision regarding reconciliation must remain voluntary.

➤ *Indigenous and Customary Traditions*

Restorative principles are reflected in numerous Indigenous and customary justice systems. These traditions may emphasise collective responsibility, community participation, restoration of balance, reintegration, spirituality, kinship obligations, healing, and the prevention of future conflict. However, Indigenous legal traditions should not simply be classified as local versions of Western restorative justice. They are distinct legal and moral systems with their own authorities, histories, procedures, and conceptions of justice.

Research on Indigenous legal traditions in Canada, for example, identifies similarities with restorative justice in relation to healing, reconciliation, community participation, and reintegration. It also highlights important differences, including the centrality of kinship, spirituality, preventive obligations, and, historically, the use of both restorative and punitive sanctions. Recognising these distinctions prevents the appropriation or oversimplification of Indigenous justice practices.

➤ *New Zealand, Canada, Europe and Other Jurisdictions*

Family-group conferencing in New Zealand became one of the most influential institutional expressions of restorative justice, particularly in youth justice. It created a structured space in which young offenders, victims, families, professionals, and community members could participate in determining an appropriate response to wrongdoing.

In Canada, restorative practices have included victim-offender mediation, community justice committees, healing circles, and sentencing circles. In Europe and Latin America, restorative justice has developed through victim-offender mediation, youth diversion, community-based dispute resolution, and integration into formal criminal procedure. The exact form of restorative justice is influenced by legal culture. Common-law and civil-law systems differ in how they distribute authority among judges, prosecutors, communities, victims, and facilitators (Díaz Gude & Navarro Papic, 2020).

At the international level, restorative justice has also influenced transitional justice processes. Truth commissions, community reconciliation initiatives, local accountability mechanisms, and reparative programmes often contain restorative elements, although they may not satisfy every

requirement of restorative justice. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, for example, elevated truth-telling, acknowledgement, conditional accountability, victim participation, and national reconciliation, while also generating debate about punishment, reparations, and the limits of forgiveness.

VI. RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IN TRADITIONAL AFRICAN SOCIETIES

Traditional African societies are diverse, and their justice systems cannot be reduced to a single model. Nevertheless, many customary systems share a relational understanding of wrongdoing. Harm may be understood as a disturbance of the relationship between individuals, families, lineages, the living community, ancestors, the natural environment, and the moral order.

Under this relational worldview, an offence is not resolved merely because an individual perpetrator has been punished. The wider social damage must also be repaired. Elders, chiefs, religious authorities, women's representatives, youth leaders, and family members may participate in establishing the facts, recognising responsibility, determining compensation, restoring dignity, reconciling the parties, and preventing retaliation.

Compensation is especially important in cases involving death, physical injury, destruction of property, or other serious harm. It may take the form of livestock, money, land, goods, labour, symbolic gifts, or other culturally recognised resources. Compensation acknowledges the victim's loss and imposes a tangible obligation on the offender and, in some systems, the offender's family or kinship group.

The communalisation of compensation reflects the belief that individuals are embedded in broader relationships of identity and responsibility. Relatives may contribute because they have a duty to restore peace, prevent revenge, discipline their member, and repair relations with the affected family. This collective responsibility may also make compliance more achievable where an individual offender lacks sufficient resources.

However, communal responsibility should not erase individual culpability or impose unjust burdens on relatives who had no involvement in the offence. The process should distinguish between the offender's personal responsibility and the community's voluntary role in supporting reparation and reconciliation.

Studies of restorative justice in Africa identify both formal and informal applications, including responses to criminal offences, family conflicts, neighbourhood disputes, community tensions, and post-conflict violations. Indigenous mechanisms such as the Baraza process in the Democratic Republic of Congo have been examined for their potential to promote victim participation, accountability, peace, and reconciliation, particularly where formal institutions face serious limitations (Murhula, 2022; Naudé, 2006).

VII. RECONCILIATION RITUALS AND THE MORAL AUTHORITY OF SETTLEMENTS

In many customary settings, a settlement is not considered complete when compensation is paid or a verbal agreement is reached. The parties may be required to participate in a ritual marking the transition from hostility to restored relations. Such rituals can include a shared meal, blessing, sacrifice, oath-taking, exchange of gifts, public apology, cleansing ceremony, symbolic burial of weapons, handshake, communal prayer, or declaration before elders and spiritual authorities.

These practices should not be dismissed as superstition. They are embedded in worldviews through which communities interpret morality, responsibility, misfortune, social order, and the consequences of violating solemn commitments. Their effectiveness may derive from several mutually reinforcing mechanisms.

First, ritual creates a clear boundary between the period of conflict and the beginning of restored relations. Second, it communicates the settlement through symbols that are widely understood by the community. Third, it makes the agreement public and therefore more difficult for either party to deny. Fourth, it gives elders, relatives, and community leaders responsibility for monitoring compliance. Fifth, it may attach moral or spiritual consequences to renewed violence. Finally, it offers emotional and social closure by allowing participants to enact peace rather than merely discuss it.

A shared ritual meal is especially significant. Eating together symbolically contradicts the social distance associated with enmity. It communicates that the parties can once again enter a relationship of mutual recognition and social interaction. When performed before relatives, elders, and community representatives, the meal becomes both a symbol of reconciliation and a public record of the commitment to peace.

Spiritual invocation may further strengthen an agreement where the parties recognise the authority of ancestors, religious teachings, or sacred institutions. The principal mechanism is not simply fear of supernatural punishment. Spiritual authority may reinforce conscience, identity, belonging, communal memory, and the moral seriousness of the commitment. In this way, ritual transforms a negotiated agreement into a covenant witnessed by both the community and a recognised moral order.

VIII. RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AND CYCLICAL REVENGE KILLINGS

Revenge killings are rarely sustained by a single act of violence. They are sustained by a cycle of injury, grief, humiliation, collective blame, fear, honour-based obligation, retaliation, and counter-retaliation. Each killing produces a new victim group that may consider revenge necessary to restore dignity, demonstrate strength, honour the dead, or deter further attacks.

Formal prosecution may remove one offender from the community, but it does not necessarily resolve collective grievances. The victim's relatives may regard the punishment as inadequate, delayed, inaccessible, politically manipulated, or unrelated to their emotional and material losses. The offender's family may perceive the prosecution as collective persecution. Where state institutions are weak or distrusted, both sides may resort to self-help violence.

Restorative justice can interrupt this cycle through six related processes.

➤ *Truth-telling and Acknowledgement*

Affected parties require an opportunity to explain what happened, how they were harmed, and how the offence changed their lives. The offender's acknowledgement validates the victim's experience and reduces disputes over responsibility. Truth-telling may also correct rumours, collective accusations, and exaggerated narratives that encourage further violence.

➤ *Responsibility and Answerability*

The offender must accept responsibility without transferring blame to the victim, the community, alcohol, anger, or political circumstances. Responsibility includes answering questions, recognising consequences, expressing remorse where genuine, and participating in the repair of harm.

Accountability should not be confused with humiliation. Public degradation may increase resentment and make reintegration more difficult. Restorative accountability condemns the harmful act while preserving the possibility that the offender can change and return to lawful community life. This distinction resembles Braithwaite's concept of reintegrative rather than stigmatising responses to wrongdoing (Braithwaite, 1989).

➤ *Reparation and Compensation*

Compensation acknowledges loss and provides material support to the victim or bereaved family. In cases of homicide, no payment can replace a human life.

Compensation should therefore not be presented as purchasing forgiveness or assigning a monetary value to the deceased. Its purpose is to recognise responsibility, alleviate some consequences of the loss, and demonstrate the offender's commitment to repair.

➤ *Restoration of Dignity*

Revenge is frequently motivated by the belief that an injury has diminished the status of a person, family, or community. A restorative process must therefore address dignity. Public acknowledgement, apology, respectful dialogue, compensation, and the participation of respected authorities can demonstrate that the victim's suffering has been recognised and that the affected family has not been ignored.

➤ *Ritualised Commitment to Non-retaliation*

A ritual can provide the definitive moment at which the parties renounce revenge. Through oath-taking, blessing, prayer, shared food, symbolic exchange, or another culturally legitimate act, the parties publicly declare that the dispute has ended. Collective witnesses become custodians of the agreement, while moral and spiritual authority strengthens the obligation to comply.

➤ *Reintegration and Follow-up*

A settlement remains vulnerable when the parties return to communities where rumours, trauma, political mobilisation, alcohol misuse, weapons, and unresolved grievances continue to exist. Follow-up is therefore essential. Elders, local authorities, women's groups, youth representatives, religious leaders, civil society organisations, police, and justice institutions may monitor the agreement, respond to warning signs, and support continuing interaction between the parties.

IX. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The proposed framework explains revenge killing as a self-reinforcing cycle and restorative justice as an intervention that transforms the relationships and obligations sustaining that cycle.

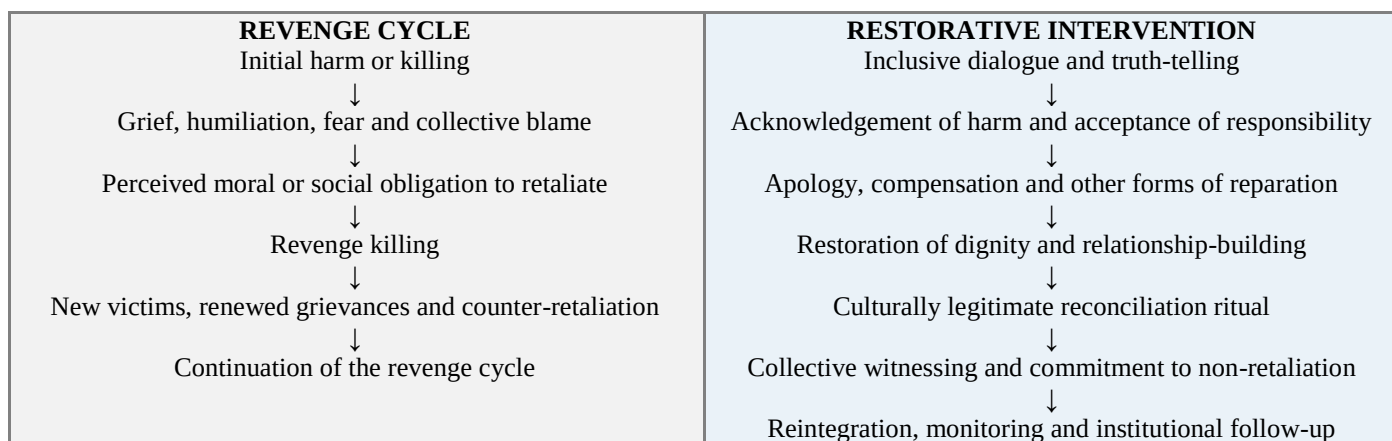


Fig 1 Conceptual Framework Explaining the Interruption of Cyclical Revenge Killings through Restorative Justice

Expected outcomes: Reduced pressure for retaliation → Behavioural restraint → Restored relationships → Improved

social cohesion → Prevention of renewed violence → Sustainable peace

The framework proposes that restorative justice does not interrupt revenge merely by persuading victims to forgive. It weakens the social and moral drivers of retaliation by replacing the perceived obligation to avenge harm with an alternative obligation to respect a publicly witnessed settlement.

Compensation addresses material and symbolic loss. Acknowledgement restores recognition. Apology affirms responsibility. Ritual communicates closure. Collective witnesses create social accountability. Spiritual or moral sanctions reinforce restraint. Follow-up institutions protect the settlement from new incidents and misinformation.

The effectiveness of the framework depends on several conditions: the legitimacy of facilitators, voluntary participation, acknowledgement of responsibility, proportional reparation, victim safety, cultural acceptance of the ritual, inclusion of influential family and community members, and credible monitoring.

X. LIMITATIONS AND SAFEGUARDS

Restorative justice has significant potential, but it also creates risks. Informal processes may reproduce existing inequalities based on gender, age, wealth, political authority, disability, clan status, or social position. Victims may be pressured to accept apology, compensation, forgiveness, or reconciliation to preserve community harmony. Powerful offenders may manipulate elders or use compensation to avoid appropriate legal consequences.

Restorative processes may also expose victims to intimidation or retraumatisation. Face-to-face dialogue is unsuitable where an offender denies responsibility, continues to threaten the victim, or possesses overwhelming social power. In cases involving sexual violence, domestic abuse, children, organised violence, or serious human-rights violations, specially trained facilitators and enhanced safeguards are required.

The United Nations Basic Principles emphasise that participation should be voluntary, informed, safe, and subject to legal safeguards. Agreements should be reasonable and proportionate, participants should have access to legal advice where necessary, and failure to reach an agreement should not prejudice subsequent proceedings (ECOSOC, 2002; UNODC, 2020).

A credible restorative process must begin with voluntary participation and the informed consent of everyone involved. This requirement is essential because restorative justice can achieve meaningful outcomes only when participants engage freely rather than under social, political, economic, or cultural pressure. The offender must also accept at least basic responsibility for the harmful conduct, since a process based on denial, intimidation, or manipulation cannot support genuine accountability or healing.

Within this framework, the victim's safety, dignity, needs, and preferences must remain central at every stage.

Participation should therefore be structured around the victim's circumstances rather than the interests of the offender, the community, or traditional authorities. Victims must never be pressured to forgive, reconcile, accept compensation, or participate in face-to-face dialogue. Where there is a serious imbalance of power, a continuing threat, or a risk of retraumatisation, alternative arrangements or the suspension of the process may be necessary.

Ensuring victim safety also depends on the quality and independence of facilitation. Facilitators must be impartial, appropriately trained, and culturally competent, with the ability to recognise and address inequalities based on gender, age, disability, wealth, political influence, clan status, or social position. Their role should not be limited to managing dialogue; they must also ensure that the process remains fair, that weaker participants are heard, and that cultural practices do not override fundamental rights.

The same principles should guide the content of any agreement reached. Agreements must be reasonable, proportionate, realistic, consistent with human rights, and capable of implementation. Compensation, apology, restitution, or community service should not be used to minimise serious harm or enable influential offenders to escape appropriate legal consequences. Traditional authorities and community leaders must therefore be prevented from using restorative mechanisms to shield powerful individuals from accountability or to obstruct victims' access to formal justice.

For this reason, restorative justice should complement rather than replace state responsibility. Serious offences must remain subject to appropriate investigation and, where warranted, prosecution, particularly in cases involving sexual violence, domestic abuse, children, organised violence, or grave human-rights violations. Restorative measures may contribute to acknowledgement, reparation, reintegration, and social healing, but they should not undermine the rule of law or create impunity.

Inclusiveness is equally important to the legitimacy of the process. Women, young people, minorities, persons with disabilities, displaced persons, and other affected or marginalised groups must be meaningfully represented in the design, implementation, and review of restorative interventions. Their participation should influence decisions in practice rather than serve merely as symbolic representation.

Finally, the credibility of restorative justice depends on what happens after an agreement is reached. All outcomes should be clearly documented, regularly monitored, and linked to effective enforcement, protection, and early-warning arrangements. These follow-up measures help ensure compliance, identify emerging threats, and prevent renewed harm. Taken together, these safeguards enable restorative justice to promote accountability, healing, and social repair without reproducing coercion, inequality, retraumatisation, or impunity.

XI. DISCUSSION

The principal strength of restorative justice is its ability to address dimensions of violence that conventional prosecution may leave unresolved. Courts determine legal responsibility and impose sanctions, but they are not always designed to reconstruct relationships between families and communities. Restorative justice creates a space in which the human, relational, material, cultural, and moral consequences of wrongdoing can be addressed together.

This multidimensional response is particularly important in cases of cyclical revenge killing. Revenge is sustained not only by anger but also by social expectations. Family members may fear being labelled weak, disloyal, or dishonourable if they fail to retaliate. A restorative settlement must therefore create a legitimate alternative through which dignity can be restored without further bloodshed.

Public acknowledgement, adequate reparation, and ritualised closure can change the meaning of restraint. Choosing not to retaliate is no longer interpreted as surrender. It becomes compliance with a solemn agreement authorised by the community, witnessed by respected leaders, and protected by moral and institutional authority.

Ritual is especially important because peace agreements are not implemented through written words alone. Agreements endure when they become embedded in relationships, symbols, collective memory, social expectations, and institutions. Ritual helps communities internalise the settlement by making peace observable, memorable, and morally consequential.

However, cultural legitimacy cannot replace human-rights legitimacy. A customary process that silences victims, discriminates against women, coerces forgiveness, imposes excessive compensation, or protects influential offenders cannot be defended merely because it is traditional. The strongest model is therefore a hybrid one in which state institutions and customary authorities complement rather than undermine each other.

The state should provide legal safeguards, investigate serious offences, protect vulnerable participants, recognise lawful restorative agreements, and support enforcement. Customary and religious leaders can contribute cultural legitimacy, relational knowledge, moral authority, community mobilisation, and locally meaningful reconciliation practices. Civil society organisations can provide facilitation, documentation, trauma support, monitoring, and early-warning assistance.

XII. CONCLUSION

Restorative justice is neither a recent invention nor a uniform model. Its contemporary development has been influenced by religious peace traditions, Indigenous legal systems, community justice initiatives, victim-rights advocacy, and dissatisfaction with the limitations of exclusively punitive justice.

Its contribution lies in shifting the focus of justice from punishment alone to the recognition and repair of harm. Victims are provided with voice and recognition. Offenders are required to accept responsibility and contribute to reparation. Communities are engaged in rebuilding damaged relationships, supporting reintegration, and preventing recurrence. The state provides legal protection, due process, and public accountability.

In traditional African contexts, restorative justice may be strengthened through compensation, collective participation, elder mediation, public apology, shared ritual meals, oath-taking, spiritual invocation, and communal witnessing. These practices can transform negotiated settlements into socially and morally binding commitments. Their function is not merely ceremonial. They communicate closure, restore dignity, mobilise collective responsibility, and establish consequences for renewed retaliation.

Restorative justice nevertheless requires safeguards. It must not become a mechanism for coerced forgiveness, cultural discrimination, inadequate accountability, or avoidance of lawful prosecution. Its use should be voluntary, victim-sensitive, rights-compliant, proportionate, and supported by professional facilitation and effective monitoring.

When these conditions are met, restorative justice can provide more than an alternative method of settling disputes. It can replace the perceived obligation to avenge violence with a publicly recognised obligation to preserve peace. In doing so, it offers a culturally grounded and relational pathway for interrupting cyclical revenge killings, restoring damaged social relations, and strengthening sustainable peace.

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